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ABSTRACT

This report describes a survey, conducted winter 1987-88, of policies, practices, programs, and plans for pregnant and parenting students in nine urban school districts. Interviews were conducted with administrators in superintendents' offices, in dropout prevention planning, and in programs for pregnant and parenting students. Among the findings were the following: (1) administrator's knowledge of this group of students is uneven; (2) support for young mothers is more limited than support for pregnant girls; (3) assistance for pregnant and parenting students is usually organized as innovations in service delivery rather than as improvements in institutional policies; (4) pregnant and parenting dropouts get shortchanged in programs set up to respond to student pregnancy; (5) dropout prevention initiatives slight the needs of pregnant and parenting students; (6) coordination among public sector agencies working with teenage mothers is limited; and (7) administrators' proposals and plans for improving help to pregnant and parenting students do not pay adequate attention to policy reform and interagency collaboration. Recommendations for improving young mothers' educational opportunities are offered. (BJV)

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IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS

A REPORT ON A SURVEY OF POLICIES, PRACTICES, PROGRAMS, AND PLANS FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS IN NINE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes a survey of policies, practices, programs, and plans for pregnant and parenting students in nine urban school districts in the United States. The survey was conducted during the winter of 1987 - 1988 by staff of the Support Center for Educational Equity for Young Mothers at the Academy for Educational Development in New York City.

The Center was established in the fall of 1986 to help educators, policymakers, and activists improve teenage mothers' educational opportunities, since without basic academic skills and a high school diploma, young mothers' economic prospects are bleak. In assisting a large variety of organizations and individuals concerned with the schooling of young mothers, Center staff saw a need for better information about how school districts are currently responding to pregnant and parenting students who have not completed high school. The survey discussed in this report was undertaken so that Center staff could explore in greater depth what educational policymakers and practitioners in individual school districts are doing for pregnant and parenting teenagers and how they think their approaches towards these students might be improved.

In each of the nine cities surveyed, phone interviews were held with administrators in three types of roles in their school districts: administrators in superintendents' offices, in dropout prevention planning, and in programs for pregnant and parenting students. Virtually all of the administrators were well aware that teenage pregnancy is a problem affecting many of their students. Furthermore, each of their districts provides assistance for some pregnant and parenting students. However, there was enormous variation in these administrators' knowledge of the numbers of students affected, their educational needs, and the responsiveness of youth-serving institutions to these needs; and, the types of help their districts offer pregnant and parenting students also vary considerably.

The following summary highlights what we learned from the interviews.

- **Administrators' knowledge of this group of students is uneven.** While many administrators knew how many babies are born to teenage mothers each year in their city, most administrators did not know how many pregnant and parenting teenagers are in their district, what percent of these teenagers have not completed high school, and what proportion of female dropouts in their district have children.

- **Support for young mothers is more limited than support for pregnant girls.** When school systems set up special programs in response to teenage parenthood, these programs usually serve pregnant students. If special services for student mothers have been established, most of them target a small number of students.

- **Assistance for pregnant and parenting students is usually organized as innovations in service delivery rather than improvements in institutional policies.** Typically help for pregnant and parenting students is provided through special programs and services. Most districts have not pursued broader policy reforms that would encourage this group of students (as well as many others groups of students) to remain in or return to school.

- **Pregnant and parenting dropouts get shortchanged in programs set up to respond to student pregnancy.** Most administrators concerned about pregnant girls and teenage mothers focus on those who are still in school. Outreach mechanisms to locate and re-enroll dropouts who are parents (or are about to become parents) are weak; instead, such recruitment depends on the goodwill of concerned individuals within and outside the school system.

- **Dropout prevention initiatives slight the needs of pregnant and parenting students.** Dropout prevention or other at-risk youth initiatives often cite teenage pregnancy as an issue but infrequently allocate funds for improving assistance for pregnant and parenting students.

- **Coordination among public sector agencies working with teenage mothers is limited.** There is not enough formal collaboration among staff of welfare, health, social service and education agencies in terms of identifying and serving school-age mothers who have not completed high school.

- **Administrators' proposals and plans for improving help to pregnant and parenting students do not pay adequate attention to policy reform and interagency collaboration.** Administrators have many ideas for helping pregnant and parenting teenagers more effectively, but few focus on policy changes or multi-service coordination. Therefore, it is not surprising that most districts' actual plans for improving assistance to pregnant or parenting students contain similar limits -- these plans are usually confined to expanding current programming or adding one or two new service components to a few schools.

This report examines why we must focus on teenage mothers' educational needs, provides a fuller discussion of the findings summarized above, and offers recommendations for improving young mothers' educational opportunities.

THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF YOUNG MOTHERS

Over the past two decades, birth rates among American teenagers declined substantially. However, at the same time, the proportion of teenage mothers who are single increased dramatically. With such a large number of adolescents having their children outside of marriage, and with another sizable group ending up divorced, teenage mothers often become the primary wage earners for their children for significant periods of time. Yet, many teenage mothers are ill-prepared as breadwinners because of weak educational credentials. In today's labor market a family provider needs at least a high school diploma.

Teen mothers with a high school education are less likely to live in poverty or rely on welfare for protracted periods of time. Unfortunately, it appears that about half of teenage mothers do not have a high school degree when they deliver: each year about forty percent of teenage mothers are younger than 18, and it is likely that most of them, as well as some proportion of the remaining teenage mothers, do not have a degree. To make matters worse, by the time their babies are a few months old, a large proportion of the mothers who need to finish their secondary education are out of school. (While some of these mothers dropped out before they got pregnant, most left school during pregnancy, after they gave birth, or later.) As a consequence, many teenage mothers put off their pursuit of a high school degree for years: the practical problems of caring for their babies and meeting school requirements are overwhelming.

Given the demands of pregnancy and parenthood, it might seem appropriate for teen mothers to stay out of school for some time. However, research on school-age mothers' educational patterns indicates that they are more likely to complete high school (and delay subsequent pregnancies) if they are enrolled in school during pregnancy and after birth.

Thus, the challenge for public policymakers is to tackle those obstacles which

get in the way of teenage mothers finishing high school in a timely fashion. To expand teenage mothers' educational opportunities, it is critical to focus on what school districts can do. The next section will discuss what we learned from the Center's survey of school district administrators so as to enlarge our understanding of how districts typically respond to pregnant and parenting teenagers.

THE SURVEY

The Center's "Survey of Policies, Programs, Practices, and Plans for Pregnant and Parenting Students in Nine Urban School Districts" was conducted during the winter of 1987-1988. Staff interviewed three types of administrators in nine urban school districts. Selection of these cities was based on the following criteria: geographical diversity; ethnic/racial mix of the population; staff's knowledge of school districts' approaches to pregnant and parenting students; and the intensity of a school system's focus on dropout prevention. The survey was primarily concerned with the problems facing teenage mothers since only a small proportion of babies born to teenage mothers have teenage fathers, and the burden of child care usually falls on teenage mothers, whether or not they are married.

The survey focused on soliciting answers to the following questions:

1. How much do district administrators know about the population of pregnant and parenting teenagers in their district who have not completed a high school degree?

2. How do district administrators think about their responsibility towards this population of students?

3. What types of assistance do districts currently offer pregnant and parenting students?

4. Does any district organize their response to this population in a systemic way?

5. Are students in this population targeted for dropout prevention or at-risk youth initiatives?

6. Has any district developed an inter-agency, collaborative planning process for meeting the needs of pregnant and parenting teenagers?

7. What do educators think should be done in their district to help pregnant and parenting teenagers with schooling?

8. What plans have district administrators made for improving assistance to pregnant and parenting students?

In the next five pages, the information we obtained in answer to each of these questions is summarized. This summary is followed by a discussion of how we view the survey findings.

Question 1: How much do district administrators know about the population of pregnant and parenting teenagers in their district who have not completed high school?

The staff of special programs for pregnant and parenting students were most knowledgeable about this population in their district. Nonetheless, their information about the numbers of pregnant and parenting teenagers in their district was usually based on health department statistics on the number of babies born to teenagers in a particular year. Neither this group of educators nor the others offered estimates of what might be the total number of teen mothers -- those who gave birth in previous years, as well as those who have just given birth -- in their city. Furthermore, no one ventured even a guess as to what proportion of young mothers in their city need to complete a high school degree.

Despite the lack of data on this group of students, few respondents mentioned plans to improve data collection. And only one administrator discussed working with other public agencies (particularly health facilities) to ascertain the school status of teenagers having babies.

Question 2: How do district administrators think about their responsibility towards this population of students?

Administrators' views about pregnant and parenting students varied according to their positions. District-level administrators were aware of the special difficulties facing pregnant and parenting students, yet many defined their obligations towards this group fairly narrowly, partially because of limited resources. They focused on the pregnant girls and student mothers who are already being served and offered few observations as to how they might improve outreach towards pregnant

or parenting dropouts.

There was a great range among the dropout prevention administrators we talked with regarding their knowledge of and plans to assist pregnant and parenting teens. Some spoke in rather general terms about new efforts that could help pregnant girls and young mothers, while others had concrete ideas for ways to improve how these students are treated. However, few of these administrators knew how large a group of dropouts teen mothers are or discussed system-wide assistance for this group of students.

As teen pregnancy program directors were the best informed about the needs and status of teenage mothers in their community, they had strong opinions about what their district should be doing to assist pregnant and parenting students effectively. However, many of these administrators said that their views do not have sufficient impact because they are not included in district policy-making meetings. One well known teenage pregnancy program director said, "We are not consulted when we should be." She and others suggested that this is because district staff do not share their sense of responsibility toward pregnant and parenting students. One said, "I feel that, in our district, our clients -- teen moms -- are not considered worth planning for." Another said, "These kids don't exist for our district."

Question 3: What types of assistance do districts currently offer pregnant and parenting students?

Most districts direct their assistance for this population into special programs for pregnant girls, often provided at separate sites. Services for young mothers are less common. Programs for pregnant and parenting students in mainstream schools are limited, and special support for pregnant teens and student mothers at alternative schools (other than the special programs for pregnant or parenting students) is weak.

Most administrators did not know how pregnant and parenting students fare in

schools where no special assistance is offered to them. Some of the teen pregnancy program directors indicated that they felt many school personnel had punitive attitudes towards these girls. Also, they cited "subtle pressure" on pregnant girls to attend the special programs and lack of concern about whether these girls actually made the transfer to special programs or simply dropped out. However, the directors also noted that every school has its share of kind, helpful staff who go out of their way for these young women. Indeed, they said that they believed that in mainstream schools the well-being of pregnant and parenting students is heavily dependent upon the advocacy, guidance, and persistent attentiveness of these individuals.

Question 4: Does any district organize their response to this population in a systemic way?

Most districts are not focused on systemic, district-wide changes in policies and practices that would improve the educational options of pregnant and parenting teens. To the contrary, most school administrators tend to think in terms of programs, rather than policies. Among the districts we surveyed, there were two exceptions: one is reviewing policies related to transfer procedures, length of maternity leave, criteria for excused absences, adequacy of mainstream schools responses to student mothers, and so on; and another is in the process of launching new approaches to improve significantly the identification of out-of-school teenage mothers.

Question 5: Are students in this population targeted for dropout prevention or at-risk youth initiatives?

Pregnant and parenting students are absent from most dropout prevention plans, even though most administrators said that pregnancy and parenting is a major reason why female students leave school. Some administrators noted that, despite changes in attitudes in recent years, this population is still considered "bad" in many quarters and too controversial to help. As one educator put it: "People think

that if we help pregnant students, we're advocating teenage sex." Other administrators felt that the scant attention paid to pregnant and parenting students in dropout prevention initiatives reflected the underutilization of teen pregnancy experts by those concerned with improving the education options for dropout-prone youth. As a result, the special needs of pregnant and parenting students often do not receive the attention they deserve. (In a few instances, however, teen pregnancy staff told us that by sheer persistence they were able to convince district administrators to do more for pregnant and parenting teens.)

From our interviews, it was clear that dropout prevention personnel are in a critical position. They can move district administrators to action on behalf of pregnant and parenting students. However, we found that they were unlikely to do so unless they had worked closely with staff in programs for this population, unless staff of teen pregnancy programs had been included in groups planning school improvement measures, or unless teenage pregnancy activists had been unusually persistent in their efforts for change.

Question 6: Has any district developed an inter-agency, collaborative planning process for meeting the needs of pregnant and parenting teenagers?

Formal collaboration among public and private agencies for sharing resources to prevent school leaving among teenage mothers is unusual. However, in many cities, interagency referrals are said to be working well. "In our city there is constant, informal networking," reported one teenage pregnancy program director. Also, in some instances, community-based organizations formally operate the district's special program for pregnant students.

The isolation of schools from other public agencies targeting this population seems to be a critical problem since the teen pregnancy program administrators report that they have trouble recruiting out-of-school young mothers and are strapped for funds to initiate new approaches. Many program directors recognize this: several mentioned preliminary discussions or contacts with other public

administrators (in welfare, for example), but significant inter-agency cooperation had not evolved.

Question 7: What do educators think should be done in their district to help pregnant and parenting teenagers with schooling?

District staff provided an impressive group of ideas for how to improve assistance to pregnant and parenting students. The following is a list of changes district educators thought should be pursued to increase the odds of young mothers completing high school on time.

- an **administrative process** for identifying and monitoring pregnant and parenting students -- for example, when they transfer back to a regular school from a school for pregnant students -- including use of case management and site coordination strategies.
- improved options for school-based or neighborhood **child-care**;
- **supplemental services and scheduling flexibility** for young mothers at mainstream high schools, vocational education or occupational training programs, night school, adult education programs, and so on;
- new approaches to assist **middle school-age** mothers;
- **realistic maternity leave policies**;
- **special programs for students with home responsibilities or a need for more independent study options**;
- **transportation subsidies**;
- improved **data collection** on this population in and out of school;
- **staff training** on working with this population;
- improvements in **employment preparation, health, family planning, and parenting education** services.

Question 8: What plans have district administrators made for improving assistance to pregnant and parenting students?

While many of the administrators we interviewed told us what they would like to do to lower barriers to school enrollment and completion for student mothers, few could cite plans in their districts to improve significantly the scale of assistance offered pregnant and parenting teens. By contrast, however, a small number of districts are pursuing innovative new steps for helping pregnant girls and

teen mothers.

In one district, a curriculum specialist in home economics reported that she had been given the authority to act as a "district planner" in developing proposals for change. She sees her mission as formulating suggestions for improvement in the school system's data base on pregnant and parenting students; for an administrative process that will enable staff to track these students' progress; for an instructional program that meets state requirements regarding the education of school-age mothers; and for the credentials of teachers giving the courses designed to meet student mothers unique needs (courses in parenting, health education, including family planning, and vocational preparation, for example).

In this same district, the Director of Special Programs said, "Our approach is piecemeal, but we want to be more systematic. Our district is poised to make the changes that are necessary. Right now we have counselors working with teenage parents in three of our high schools, and we have a school for pregnant students. Our goal is to have programs (serving the needs of pregnant girls and teen parents) with full-time coordinators in each of our 15 high schools. The coordinator is a must. These youngsters need an advocate to look after them."

Another district is refining plans for new ways of strengthening approaches for identifying teenage mothers needing to re-enroll in a program leading to a high school degree. Follow-up phone calls are being made to girls who dropped out of one of the district's alternative high school programs; and Headstart programs are used to recruit teenage mothers who have not completed high school. This district is also working to expand the array of educational programs appropriate for pregnant students and teenage mothers.

In a third instance, the school district is planning an extraordinary new facility for the school that serves pregnant girls and, to a more limited degree, young parents. The school's director hopes that the space available in the new site will allow the program staff to work more effectively on meeting the needs of

pregnant and parenting students throughout the district.

Many of the remaining districts have some sort of special services for pregnant girls and young mothers. Usually the administrators in these districts reported plans for enhancing these services (adding a child care center to a school trying to serve student mothers, for example) rather than developing more broad-based reforms.

DISCUSSION

It is deceptively easy to say that this survey confirmed our assumptions as to how most districts are dealing with the challenges posed by pregnant and parenting teens. From our experience with teenage pregnancy activists around the country and from careful analysis of the literature on pregnant teens and young mothers in school, we believed, at the outset of the survey, that the educational needs of pregnant and parenting teens were insufficiently addressed in most school districts. We also thought that this inequity was being perpetuated, rather than alleviated, through the new dropout prevention/at-risk youth initiatives which logically ought to direct a significant amount of attention and resources towards this population.

Our interviews gave us a wealth of information and anecdotes to substantiate this view. However, after nearly six months of intensive investigation of how school districts respond to pregnant and parenting students, we are uncomfortable with the notion, which might appear to be implicit in our assessment, that districts are consciously ignoring the problems of a very needy group of students.

Our interviews gave us a vivid sense that many dedicated individuals are working to help this population. However, we believe that pregnant and parenting teens are victimized by a number of factors which combine to keep them low on everyone's short list of students to be targeted for assistance. First, pregnant and parenting teens are characterized by attributes that, taken together, make it more likely that school personnel will slight their problems: they are disproportionately poor, minority, and behind grade level in school; and, by some, they are seen as

"bad" for having had sex and for having a child. Second, they are frequently out-of-sight, out-of-mind: they have either left school or they have enrolled in a special program which keeps them away from the mainstream schools and their staff. Third, the situation of young mothers has changed rapidly in the past decade: not only are more of them single (or will be single for some period while their children are young), but also, increasingly, they are expected to earn their own living. Yet, educational institutions, as well as other youth-serving institutions, have not changed their programming sufficiently to prepare young women adequately as breadwinners.

And finally, school resources are strained to the hilt by the new mission facing school -- educating all adolescents. Most educators were trained in an era which held that, while all students were entitled to an education, the responsibility for obtaining it was theirs. Now they work in an era which maintains, in effect, that all students are entitled to a high school diploma and that it is the schools' responsibility to ensure that they get one. The institutional adjustments and changes required by this new mission are difficult, especially under conditions of fiscal retrenchment. Not surprisingly, it seems justifiable to overlook the problems of pregnant and parenting students.

The apparent neglect of teenage mothers is also attributable to the fact that administrators working within these districts do not have a good grasp of how many teenage mothers are in their district or what proportion have yet to acquire a high school degree. As a result, administrators do not act as if pregnant and parenting teens were a significant proportion of their dropout population. **Yet, pregnant and parenting girls probably comprise half of the female dropout population in most school districts (and, therefore, a quarter of the entire dropout population).** To meet the needs of this group of dropouts equitably and effectively will require new types of approaches and planning processes.

To sum up: it is clear why educational administrators slight the needs of

pregnant and parenting teenagers in their school districts. They are swamped with many problems that are as serious as student parenthood, and, for a variety of reasons, they accord many other problems higher priority. Therefore, they are very dependent upon the leadership of key individuals experienced in the issues surrounding teenage parenthood to develop momentum, mechanisms, and ideas for change.

Thus, while we found both lack of knowledge and stereotyping to be major factors in why the educational needs of pregnant and parenting teens are inadequately addressed, we were more impressed with administrators' sense of being overwhelmed. They lack the critical ingredients that facilitate change: solid **knowledge** about the numbers of pregnant and parenting teens; **leadership** because school personnel with extensive knowledge of this population are typically not included in planning groups focusing on school improvement and dropout prevention; **models** because very few districts have tried to make systemic changes on behalf of this population; and, as many survey respondents noted, **resources** for approaches they see as appropriate but expensive -- school-based child care and case managers, for instance.

Furthermore, in many places administrators still fear opposition if they try to help these students more adequately. Without a vision of what should be done, solid information about how to make appropriate change, and monetary incentives to pursue improvements, administrators are naturally reluctant to extend themselves to a controversial group of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve educational opportunities for pregnant and parenting students, a variety of policy improvements at local, state, and national levels will be required. For school districts to expand their assistance for this group of students they need: **additional resources** through new funds and resource-sharing with other institutions serving this population; **guidance** about how to initiate and sustain district-wide

change; and **models** of what changes are desirable and how to implement them.

It is especially important that administrators working within school districts have access to **better information about how to help all pregnant and parenting students** effectively. Presently, any district which would commit itself to a process of district-wide policy improvement for pregnant and parenting teens would have no models to emulate regarding how that process should proceed or what an enlightened reform plan would look like. Furthermore, there is simply no knowledge as to what constitutes "best practices" for handling many of the issues that arise in trying to help pregnant and parenting teens -- that is, we have very little comparative information as to what districts could do about maternity leaves, outreach, transfer procedures, employment guidance, mainstreaming and so on. There are exemplary programs that have successful ways of handling one or more of these issues, but only a very lucky or dedicated district educator would learn where to seek the information.

As a first step, **district personnel need help to initiate a planning process** that will enable the district to get the facts on this group of students in the district; utilize the expertise of school personnel and community professionals who work with young parents; collaborate with local public and private agencies to marshall the resources needed to pursue new approaches (including, where appropriate, developing school-community partnerships to enhance assistance to teen mothers); and contact educators in other districts and groups for information on policies and programs worth adapting.

To provide school district staff with adequate support so they can make changes on the scale required to serve pregnant and parenting students more equitably and effectively, funders, policymakers, and activists ought to pursue the following recommendations.

1. Various strategies should be developed for **educating educators, public policy-makers, and teenage pregnancy activists** about young mothers' educational problems and the need for new approaches to serving them. Articles in professional newsletters and presentations at professional conferences are

needed. Also, a special effort to reach people working in dropout prevention should be organized as the neglect of pregnant and parenting students through these initiatives is particularly conspicuous and inequitable.

2. A variety of systemic approaches to **school district reform** on behalf of pregnant and parenting students should be stimulated, documented, and, where effective, promoted. Such experiments would have to involve several important foci: the identification of teen mothers without their high school accreditation; the provision of assistance to these young women until they complete high school; an emphasis on helping young mothers delay subsequent births; and the consistent monitoring of their progress. These foci would require a high degree of cooperation and coordination among the primary public agencies serving teenage mothers -- health, social service, welfare, and education. School districts would have to collaborate with these local public agencies and private organizations for both planning and service delivery. Therefore, the planning and implementation process would have to be considered as important as the final changes.

3. **On-going technical assistance** -- information and advice -- should be made available to educators, teen pregnancy activists, and others who are seeking help with improving school-based or district-wide responses to pregnant and parenting students. District staff and other staff at community youth-serving agencies need how-to guidance on developing:

   (a) **school-community partnerships** for planning and service delivery;

   (b) improved **data collection** on this population in the school system;

   (c) effective **outreach strategies** for locating out-of-school pregnant and parenting teens;

   (d) **tracking mechanisms** to ensure that pregnant and parenting teens transfer successfully between school programs during pregnancy and after delivery;

   (e) **support services** for parents at mainstream schools, alternative schools, night programs, GED classes, and so on;

   (f) **on-going support** for the most vulnerable young mothers, perhaps utilizing the San Francisco Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting (TAPP) Program's case management model; and

   (g) **resources** adequate to the approaches that must be developed.

4. A **policy paper** analyzing examples of state or federal legislation and administrative regulations that provide support for school districts to organize systematic approaches to pregnant and parenting students should be developed.

CONCLUSION

The aim of AED's school district survey, reported here, was to provide advocates with better information as to what school districts are doing and planning in order to assist pregnant and parenting students. We found that pregnant and

parenting teenagers' educational problems are widely acknowledged. Early parenthood is commonly cited as contributing to school leaving among girls. Many school districts have set up special programs for pregnant students and special services for student mothers (and occasionally even student fathers).

Yet, however good these individual programs, they serve only a fraction of the need. Moreover, even in school districts where collaboration among staff in schools and community agencies has created a broader response to the problems of teenage parenthood, it is primarily the social and medical needs -- and not the academic needs -- of pregnant girls that are addressed. Over the past few decades the most common response to helping student parents has been to organize a separate program for pregnant girls. It is ironic that the success of this approach has often allowed district staff to neglect questions about who is not attending these programs and what happens to girls once they leave the program. As a consequence, in most communities, educators and other service providers have not addressed the diverse and systemic barriers to pregnant and parenting students continuing in an educational program leading to a high school diploma.

Dropout prevention and at-risk youth initiatives offer districts a way to begin improving their help for pregnant and parenting students. However, although pregnant girls and young mothers make up about half of all female dropouts (or a quarter of all dropouts), they receive scant attention through these reforms and programs.

Activists concerned with the problems that plague teenage mothers must concentrate on their problems with educational institutions. The case for lobbying district-level educators to become more responsive to the needs of pregnant and parenting students rests on both legal and practical grounds. On the one hand, pregnant and parenting students are entitled to educational options geared to their needs and to their fair share of dropout prevention resources. On the other hand, the human costs of ignoring the educational needs of teenage mothers are high: too

many teenage mothers face economic hardship for much of their lives. Furthermore, given the effect of a mother's educational attainment on her children's achievement, the children of teenage mothers are especially vulnerable to school failure. Therefore, helping student mothers should have a positive effect on two generations of students.

There is yet another reason to work with educators on improving their responsiveness to the needs of pregnant and parenting teens: new directions in welfare reform will probably require greater labor force participation by welfare recipients. As a large proportion of teenage mothers rely on welfare at some point in their lives, those mothers who have already completed high school will be in a far less vulnerable position when new regulations go into effect.

Fortunately, the approaches educational institutions must initiate in order to offer student mothers appropriate educational opportunities are similar to other new policies and practices that must be developed in order to serve all students -- and especially students who have traditionally left high school before graduation -- more effectively. Pregnant and parenting teenagers are not a special constituency asking for favors from a school system. They are typical of a large group of students for whom the present structure of high school education does not work.